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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 000833

SIPDIS

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DEPARTMENT PASS TO AID/OTI (RPORTER)

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: CHAVEZ: INDIRECTLY, US IS STILL TO BLAME

REF: A. CARACAS 809
 [1](#)B. CARACAS 724
 [1](#)C. CARACAS 445

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Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR FRANCISCO FERNANDEZ,
REASONS 1.4 (B) and (D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: At a military graduation ceremony on June 30, President Chavez continued to express strong support for ousted Honduran President Manuel Zelaya. Chavez, while acknowledging the helpfulness of statements from President Obama and Secretary of State Clinton, also declared that the U.S. support of the Honduran military and American presence and activities throughout Latin America laid the groundwork for the military removal of Zelaya on June 28. He stated that the military forces of all ALBA (Bolivarian Alliance of Latin America) members were ready to defend Zelaya's position. Opposition leaders have tried to highlight the similarities between the lack of respect for democratic processes in Honduras with Chavez's actions towards elected opposition officials in Venezuela. End Summary.

Still Blaming the U.S.

[1](#)2. (C) Following his initial outrage of the ouster of Zelaya (Ref A), President Chavez has maintained an outspoken presence domestically and internationally against the military actions in Honduras. In a speech during a seven-hour graduation and promotion ceremony at a military school in Maracay on June 30, Chavez acknowledged the statements of support for Zelaya from President Obama and Secretary Clinton. He emphasized, however, that the Honduran military had had extensive training in the U.S. which encouraged them to take this kind of action. Chavez said that this event demonstrated that "all soldiers must cut themselves off from the American empire." Senior military leadership also attended the ceremony, which included members from all four branches of the military. Press reported July 1 that Chavez announced that the ALBA countries should be ready to use military force if Zelaya is not allowed to return peacefully to Honduras, and suggested that there might also be a role for U.N. troops to play in supporting Zelaya's return. Chavez said that he would like to accompany Zelaya when he returns to Honduras, but unfortunately he can't because, "my presence will be used as an excuse for violent acts."

[1](#)3. (SBU) In addition to President Chavez, many other members of the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (GBRV) have denounced the expulsion of President Zelaya. The

Attorney General Luis Ortega Diaz and Public Defender Gabriela Ramirez held a press conference June 29 about the events, saying they were "a serious alteration to the democratic and constitutional order." Ramirez also said the Honduran military had violated human rights by detaining government employees and suspending electricity in the city. During an extraordinary session also on June 29, the National Assembly passed a statement proposed by the external affairs committee director Ray Daza condemning the ousting of Zelaya.

Chavez Criticized for International Focus

14. (SBU) Opposition parties, using the Unity Table (Ref B) as their platform on June 29, denounced the Honduran military actions, and called on the Organization of American States (OAS) to negotiate a solution. But they also criticized President Chavez's heavy involvement in the issue, particularly his public threats of military action against Honduras. "Hugo Chavez has become the George Bush of our continent," said Angel Medina from the Accion Democratica party. Greater Caracas Mayor Antonio Ledezma, who was stripped of authority and resources in April (Ref C), said June 30 that just as the OAS and Chavez are supporting Zelaya, his electoral legitimacy should be respected as well.

And criticism has come from people who think that Chavez is spending too much time and resources outside of Venezuela; Daniel Santolo, secretary of the left-leaning opposition party La Causa R, said that Chavez was wasting his time in other countries instead of finding solutions for "the serious security problems of Venezuela." The opposition has argued that the real unconstitutional actions occurred in Honduras under Zelaya, but those arguments have gained little local

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support.

15. (C) Comment: While President Chavez has threatened military intervention in Honduras, it seems very unlikely that a Venezuelan military operation would take place. His request to consider the option of using U.N. troops is an obviously unlikely proposal as well, but if ALBA is unable to support member countries militarily it may be worthwhile for Chavez to demonstrate that the U.N. will not either. Opposition parties are trying to contrast Chavez's indignation at the military's activities in Honduras with his lack of respect for the democratic process in Venezuela. Chavez, on the other hand, is hoping to craft an outcome similar to 2002, when domestic and international pressure restored him to power after a coup.

CAULFIELD